

Message Text

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PAGE 01 HONG K 03646 220408Z
ACTION HA-05

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 EA-10 IO-13 ISO-00 INSE-00 DODE-00
CIAE-00 /041 W

-----079021 220724Z /13

R 220319Z MAR 78
FM AMCONSUL HONG KONG
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9544
INFO AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
AMEMBASSY LISBON
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
USMISSION GENEVA
USLO PEKING

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: SREF, UNHCR, HK, MC
SUBJ: INDOCHINA REFUGEE CENTER PROPOSED FOR MACAU AND
OVERCROWDING IN KONG KONG

REF: A) 77 STATE 287954 (NOTAL) B) HONG KONG 3463 (NOTAL)

1. DURING UNHCR REP CARPENTER'S RECENT VISIT TO HONG KONG
(REF B) WE DISCUSSED WITH HIM THE PROBLEMS OF HIGH COST AND
LIMITED AVAILABILITY OF REFUGEE HOUSING IN HONG KONG.
2. ON THE QUESTION OF COSTS, CARPENTER COMMENTED THAT IF LESS
COSTLY ACCOMMODATIONS COULD BE FOUND FOR REFUGEES THAT WOULD
BE "OK".

3. CONCERNING THE HOUSING SHORTAGE WE NOTED THERE WERE
CURRENTLY FEW HOTEL SPACES AVAILABLE AT THE RELATIVELY LOW
(FOR HONG KONG) RATE OF \$8 PER DAY AND IF A SUDDEN INFLUX
OF REFUGEES OCCURRED, AS HAPPENED IN PREVIOUS YEARS, HONG
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KONG WOULD BE HARD PRESSED TO HOUSE THEM IN OTHER THAN
EXPENSIVE TOURIST HOTELS. AS A POSSIBLE SOLUTION WE
SUGGESTED CARPENTER EXPLORE THE USE OF MACAU AS A TRANSIT
PLACE (REF A) SINCE THE COST OF MAINTAINING REFUGEES THERE
HAS BEEN HALF OF WHAT IT IS IN HONG KONG.

4. CARPENTER INITIALLY RESPONDED THAT REFUGEES FLOWS

WERE V HIGHLY IRREGULAR AND THAT HE WOULD WORRY ABOUT A SHORTAGE OF SPACE WHEN IT HAPPENED. HE RULED OUT THE MACAU SOLUTION SINCE IT WAS AGAINST UNHCR POLICY TO MOVE REFUGEES FROM THE COUNTRY OF FIRST ASYLUM TO ANOTHER COUNTRY BEFORE RESETTLEMENT.

5. IN A FINAL MEETING PRIOR TO HIS DEPARTURE CARPENTER REPORTED THAT HE HAD RAISED THE QUESTION OF EMERGENCY HOUSING OF REFUGEES WITH THE HONG KONG GOVERNMENT BUT DECLINED TO PROVIDE US ANY DETAILS UNTIL A SOLUTION HAD BEEN AGREED UPON. HE ADMITTED THAT THE HKG RULED OUT ANY POSSIBILITY OF OPENING CAMPS FOR THE REFUGEES.

6. COMMENT: IT IS OUR IMPRESSION THAT CARPENTER TAKES NEITHER THE QUESTION OF COST NOR THE SHORTAGE OF HOUSING VERY SERIOUSLY. UNHCR REPS HAVE SPENT LITTLE TIME IN HONG KONG AND THESE PROBLEMS HAVE BEEN ALMOST ENTIRELY LEFT TO THE ICEM REP HWO HAS BEEN KIND ENOUGH TO HELP OUT. WE ESTIMATE THAT ONLY 125 ADDITIONAL REFUGEES COULD BE ACCOMMODATED AT PRESENT RATES IF A SUDDEN INFLUX OCCURRED WHICH -- JUDGING FROM THE PAST -- WILL CERTAINLY HAPPEN. IN VIEW OF THE ABOVE WE URGE THAT THE DEPARTMENT PROD UNHCR HQ INTO TAKING A MORE SERIOUS LOOK AT THESE PROBLEMS NOW AND NOT WAIT UNTIL THE CRISIS IS UPON US. SHOESMITH

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT, PROPOSALS (BID), ESTABLISHMENT OF OFFICES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 22 mar 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978HONGK03646
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780125-1021
Format: TEL
From: HONG KONG
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780339/aaaabghm.tel
Line Count: 86
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 0c6ac1bf-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION HA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 STATE 287954, 78 HONG KONG 3463
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 27 apr 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3242580
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: INDOCHINA REFUGEE CENTER PROPOSED FOR MACAU AND OVERCROWDING IN KONG KONG
TAGS: SREF, HK, MC, UNHCR
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/0c6ac1bf-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014